



# Writing Exemplar Booklet



## Knowledge and Concepts Examinations Grades 4, 8, and 10



Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction  
John T. Benson, State Superintendent

## **WSAS Knowledge and Concepts Examinations**

# **Writing Exemplar Booklet**

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### **NOTE**

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# Foreword

The writing assessment is a component of the Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS) *Knowledge and Concepts Examinations*. These examinations are administered annually to all public school students in grades 4, 8, and 10. The writing assessment requires students to respond to one writing topic (or “prompt”). The writing assessment gives students an opportunity to demonstrate their skills in an actual writing situation and provides for the direct assessment of students’ writing abilities.

The English/Language Arts Guide, *A Guide to Curriculum Planning in English Language Arts*, published by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), identifies five writing modes commonly used in written communication: Persuasive, Informative, Expressive, Imaginative, and Formulaic. However, the WSAS writing assessment requires the student to write an essay in one of only *three* modes: Informative, Persuasive, and Expressive.

This booklet is intended to assist teachers in understanding the rubrics used in scoring the WSAS writing assessment and in their efforts to continue improvement in the instruction of writing in the public schools. An accompanying booklet, *Writing Exemplar Training Packet*, includes examples of student writing in response to each of the prompts included in this document. These papers have been modified slightly to protect the identity of the student and to adjust the quality of the writing so that it is more closely aligned with a particular score point. As the title of the companion booklet implies, the papers included in it may be used in training teachers to score students’ papers using the rubrics and exemplar papers found in this document. These two publications may be duplicated, copied, and reproduced by school staff as needed.

The WSAS is using the *CTB Writing Assessment System*, developed and published by CTB/McGraw-Hill of Monterey, California. Each writing prompt is presented to the student in a separate writing booklet that contains a short introduction to a reading passage, the reading passage, a prompt, a blank page for student planning, and two lined pages in which the students respond to the prompt. The student must limit the composition to these two lined pages and must write in pencil; most inks cannot be imaged into a computer screen.

The teacher gives oral directions to students to read the short introduction to the passage, the passage itself, and the prompt that is based on the passage, then respond to the prompt. The prompt challenges students to create their own responses and forces them to use the information in the reading passage as well as their prior knowledge and personal experience about the topic. The exemplar papers included in this booklet are actually written by fourth-, eighth-, and tenth-grade students. They have been selected from a pool of CTB writing assessments administered nationwide, as well as from WSAS writing assessments. These exemplars, like the training papers, have been modified to delete any information that might identify the writers and to adjust the quality of the responses to correspond with particular score points.

# Overview

## Student Learning and the Language Arts Curriculum

Children acquire language at an early stage and internalize its basic grammar through use before formal training in school begins. Continuing attention to language makes students aware of how language functions and helps them control and use it in increasingly effective ways.

Language is basic to thinking and learning in all disciplines. Skillful use of language may be the single most important means of realizing the over-arching goal of education: to develop informed, thinking citizens.

***“Writing is a way of building a personal world and giving an individual rather than a stereotyped shape to our day-by-day experience.”***

—John Dixon

A unified language arts curriculum will seek a balance between programs developing the communications

skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and using media with programs fostering the understanding and appreciation of language and literature. The development of these skills and the growth of a student’s understanding and appreciation are lifelong processes.

## The Purpose of This Booklet

The purpose of this booklet is to encourage effective approaches to instruction in writing. Its intent is to help the teachers improve the writing skills of their students. Its focus is the writing component of the *WSAS Knowledge and Concepts Examinations* in grades 4, 8, and 10.

***“Children learn language and its uses simultaneously.”***

—Frank Smith

Instruction in the language arts must be active so as to involve students in using language in both its receptive (listening and reading) and its productive (speaking and writing) forms. Immersion in language use should be supported by varied methods and materials reflecting student differences.

## Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards and Writing

Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards require that students in Wisconsin write clearly and effectively to share information and knowledge, to influence and persuade, and to create and entertain. Students will

- create or produce writing to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes
- plan, revise, edit, and publish clear and effective writing
- understand the function of various forms, structures, and punctuation marks of standard American English and use them appropriately in communication

***“Unless we have learned to listen to ourselves, it is difficult to hear other people. Writing helps us listen to our own voices.”***

—Donald Graves

The rationale for the need for a strong emphasis on writing skills for our students is that written communication skills are central to learning. Whether in academic life, in the workplace, or in personal life, these skills offer a powerful advantage in a world in which people must constantly learn and use new information. To become confident and effective writers, students need to learn how to write for various purposes and audiences. They need to try different approaches and to reconsider what they have written through revision and editing. To ensure that their writing is understood and well received, students need a working knowledge of language as well as the rules and skills of grammatical structures, diction and usage, punctuation, spelling, layout, and presentation. This knowledge is also invaluable for discussing, critiquing, revising, and editing written communication in almost any form.

## The Purposes of Communication

Writing does not occur in a vacuum: we write for a reason and with an audience in mind. We choose a form through which to communicate,

to interpret our experience for someone else or to interpret someone else's experience for ourselves. Thus, the relationship between the writer, reader, and subject matter is made clear through the medium of communication, our language. The meaning of this communication, however, also depends upon the cultural or

***“Writing is a deliberate act.  
One has to make up one’s mind  
to do it.”***

—James Britton

situational context of the writer and reader. A shared language and context are an integral part of communication, of our message being

received and understood.

Although the specific purposes for communication are numerous, it is possible to group them into a more limited but more useful number of general categories. These categories and their purposes are:

### *Persuasive Purpose*

The *persuasive* use of language generally attempts to change the thinking of individuals or groups. The sender of the message usually has determined that a change in the thinking and/or attitude of the receiver is necessary or desirable. Persuasive discourse, therefore, is *receiver-centered*.

Examples:     advertising, political speech, legal oratory, editorial.

### *Informative Purpose*

The *informative* use of language primarily intends to explore topics or questions to provide information, and to produce verifiable support for given questions. It is *subject-centered*.

Examples:     report, news article, summary, textbook, diagnosis.

### *Expressive Purpose*

The *expressive* use of language is *sender-centered* and is often an attempt by the originator of a message to clarify what he or she thinks and feels as well as to provide an outlet for these thoughts and feelings. When written, expressive language usually retains many of the features of spoken language.

Examples:     *Individual:* journal, diary, conversation.  
                    *Group:* manifesto, resolution.

### ✎ *Imaginative Purpose*

The *imaginative*, or literary use, of language, intended to provide aesthetic pleasure to both sender and receiver, is *language-centered*, i.e., it focuses on the piece of discourse as a work of art whose medium is language.

Examples: short story, lyric, narrative, drama, TV show, movie, limerick/joke, ballad/folk song.

### ✎ *Formulaic Purpose*

The *formulaic* use of language draws attention to the *cultural and situational context* of a message. It is designed to follow the conventions and rituals that senders and receivers expect in a particular situation.

Examples: *Oral*: greetings and farewells; special-occasion speeches; introduction of self and strangers; commencing, conducting, and concluding a meeting; accepting and presenting awards.

*Written*: letters of appreciation, congratulations, sympathy; business letters; contracts; legislative resolutions; constitutions of an organization; invitations to a social event.

While each of the purposes can be theoretically distinguished from the others, in actual communication acts they almost never appear in isolation. Literature, for example, relies upon persuasion to achieve its aims when the characters in a novel or play attempt to persuade each other or when the author attempts to persuade the reader. A poem that is primarily cathartic in nature necessarily involves expression. The purpose of an informative discourse might ultimately be to persuade and change thinking by offering verifiable evidence. Thus, while one aim is primary, other aims usually operate simultaneously in subordinate roles in any given act of communication.

We suggest that teachers provide classroom experience that allows for both the development of the student and the exploration of a range of activities in all writing purposes. Table 1 on the following two pages explains the five writing purposes.

**Table 1*****Exploring Writing Purposes***

	<b>Persuasive Writing</b>	<b>Informative Writing</b>
<b>Characteristics</b>	<p>Academic, political, and business prose</p> <p>May be factual or fictional</p> <p>May contain emotional or intellectual appeal</p> <p>Conscious pattern of organization</p> <p>Pays particular attention to needs and concerns of audience</p>	<p>Academic and professional business prose</p> <p>Straightforward, explicit, factual</p> <p>Writer conscious of content and organization</p> <p>Contains definite pattern of organization</p> <p>Focuses on the exploration or presentation of subject matter</p>
<b>Audience</b>	Others	Others
<b>Purpose</b>	Influence and change the opinions and actions of another	<p>Inform</p> <p>Describe</p> <p>Explain a process, idea, or situation</p> <p>Analyze</p>
<b>Forms</b>	<p>Report</p> <p>Editorial</p> <p>Letter</p> <p>Cartoon</p> <p>Research paper</p> <p>Advertisement</p> <p>Essay</p> <p>Political rhetoric</p> <p>Poster</p> <p>Bumper sticker</p> <p>Flier</p>	<p>Report</p> <p>Review</p> <p>Letter</p> <p>Advertisement</p> <p>Research paper</p> <p>Examination</p> <p>Agenda</p> <p>Essay</p> <p>Schedule</p> <p>Newspaper article</p> <p>Profile, portrait</p> <p>Observation</p> <p>Slide/tape</p>

<b>Expressive Writing</b>	<b>Imaginative Writing</b>	<b>Formulaic Writing</b>
Loosely structured Underlies the others A free flow of ideas, feelings Close to speech, may be rambling Often monologue Characteristically unmarked, ungraded	A verbal object Helps express emotional and intellectual content May build upon wordplay, explore private feelings, weave a fictional web May achieve depth of reflection May demonstrate great texture and depth Focuses on the manipulation of language	Highly structured Prescribed form May be culturally defined Conforms to specific situation or event May be legalistic, ritualistic
Primarily self	Self and others	Others
Explore, discover, examine ideas Make connections Build fluency Aid thinking Draw upon memory	Entertain and delight Satisfy needs of aesthetic beauty and playfulness Create or recreate experience rather than explain it	Fulfill social obligations Enter into contracts Standardize business communication Satisfy ritualistic needs Standardize legislative/legal procedures
Journal, diary, log Informal personal essay Informal letter Freewriting Brainstorming Short response/reaction Field notes Personal narrative Reminiscence, memoirs Confession	Song Tale, fable Poem Myth Play Joke, riddle Story Anecdote Essay Letter Sketch Graffiti	Letter of appreciation, sympathy, congratulations, application Business communication Contract Legislative writing Resolution Invitation Resume Ritualistic writing Joke, riddle, fable

## Writing Program Goals

***“The desire to write grows  
with writing”***

—Erasmus

The goals of a writing program are to promote and enhance student proficiency in writing through commitment to

- a consistent K–12 philosophy for the teaching of writing
- a realistic view of the developing student, of growth as cumulative
- a regard for current research on writing and language learning
- a view of writing as one of the related language arts skills, to be integrated with speaking, listening, and reading experiences
- a process that is holistic rather than an accumulation of skills

To promote writing as a process through which students

- create, discover, and shape experience
- learn content in other curricular areas
- acquire lifelong communication skills
- experience the pleasure of self expression

To establish clear and consistent criteria for evaluation that focus

- first on the holistic aspects of writing, telling students that quality of thought is important
- secondly on the semantic and syntactic concerns, telling students that written communication depends upon accepted standards and conventions in the language

## Writing for an Audience

Shaped by purpose and audience, writing takes form as *expressive, informative, persuasive, imaginative, or formulaic*. Young writers need consistent experience with each of these.

They should write to varied audiences, for varying purposes, in a multitude of forms. And they need this experience from primary grades through senior high school. At the same time, teachers should consider the developmental level of the students in relation to each of the writing purposes and audiences.

Most often, writing done in school has the teacher as its only audience. Although the teacher needs to be a reader, there is no reason why he/she is the only reader. There are many potential readers available, and students should have experience in writing for them. Expressive writing, when it is done primarily for the self, is the only exception. The other forms, however, take on genuine purpose only when the audience is authentic, usually someone other than the classroom teacher. As students mature,

***“The trouble with most school writing is that it is not genuine communication.... The teacher is seen as an assessor and not as someone interested in being communicated with.”***

—Nancy Martin

they are increasingly able to deal with a widening circle of readers, moving from self to trusted individuals, and finally to unknown, more remote audiences. The

writing curriculum should provide for this growth through varied audiences at all levels.

*Persuasive Writing/Audience:* Often clearly defined, with identifiable opinions and feelings in regard to specific topics or issues.

*Informative Writing/Audience:* Those in need of or interested in obtaining certain information.

*Expressive Writing/Audience:* Intended for writer's personal use; may involve teacher, parent, or friend.

*Imaginative Writing/Audience:* Whoever finds the work enjoyable, perhaps only self but usually others.

*Formulaic Writing/Audience:* Those joined in social, business, or governmental concerns or rituals; may be culturally defined.

## Types of Writing Prompts in WSAS

Two types of prompts are available for use in WSAS: *independent* and *reading-related, literature-based*.

*Independent* prompts are short and precise. They are designated to test writing ability, independent of the

ability to comprehend a reading passage. This type of prompt was used in the WSAS writing assessment in 1993–94, 1994–95, and 1995–96.

*Reading-related, literature-based* prompts combine reading with writing tasks. Each of these prompts begins with an introduction that explains the task, followed by a reading passage, then a related writing assignment. Reading passages include excerpts from works of fiction and nonfiction by classic and contemporary writers. Reading passages were selected for their grade-level appropriateness,

***“The problem with writing is not poor spelling, punctuation, grammar, and handwriting. The problem with writing is not writing.”***

—Donald Graves

literary value, and potential for generating student interest. This type of prompt was used in the WSAS program in 1996–97 and 1997–1998.

The WSAS writing assessment may include either of these two types of prompts in future examinations. Whether the writing prompts are independent or reading-related, the student should be familiar with both types and must be able to respond clearly and knowledgeably to either one.

## Skills and the Writing Program

There is no argument over the fact that students need to learn and master certain skills if they are to become proficient writers. Learning to deal with content, organization, and style is an ongoing process. Similarly, mastering punctuation, usage, and spelling is ongoing and necessary. The argument over skills lies only in the emphasis and place of instruction. Encouraged by textbooks that view writing as a series of isolated skills and by standardized testing that judges writing as skills, programs have removed skills from their appropriate

context: the writing process itself. Skills should be taught in the context of the writing process rather than through isolated exercises that have no bearing on real communication. There are several reasons for doing so.

- Students have a reason for learning the skills: they are going to apply them immediately.
- Learning “sticks” when it is connected with purpose.
- Students see the importance of skills and see their efforts rewarded when they see

greater success in a given piece of writing.

- Integrating language skills in writing leads to careful planning for the whole class, as well as for individualized instruction. When skills work is tailored to the writing assignment and connected with actual student drafts, the teacher is able to get at specific problems.
- More than fifty years of research, as well as classroom experience in teaching writing as isolated skills, tell us that the practice does not work. Students do not become proficient writers through the practice of drills.

There are times when language skills work should be introduced and reinforced, when the use of supporting exercises may be appropriate, such as

- just before writing, when the practice has meaning because it will be applied immediately
- during revising or editing, before the draft is submitted for formal evaluation or “publishing”
- immediately after the draft has been evaluated formally, when students will see the need to practice certain skills they had trouble with before they attend to the next writing task

It is important with all skills work that the student is not overwhelmed by demands in too many areas at one time. Teachers need to prioritize. Teachers also need to limit the number of exercises and return to full writing experience as quickly as possible.

### Major Writing-Skills Areas

The major writing-skills areas need to be viewed as corresponding with student development. Mechanics, for example, tend to become routinized at a certain

point, thus allowing for greater concentration on content, organization, or style. As organization becomes more internalized, a student may turn to more sophisticated matters of style, and so forth. Teachers need to be alert to the range of abilities present in a single classroom and to gear instruction to these individual needs.

The major writing-skills areas of Content, Organization, Style and Word Choice,

***“Inspiration usually comes during work, rather than before it.”***

—Madeleine L’Engle

Mechanics, and Publishing (shown in Table 2) also correspond directly to the classical canons of speaking rhetoric. Because both speaking and writing are

rhetorical, they involve skill areas that are essentially similar. By relating these areas, teachers of writing can build on and reinforce skills learned through speaking experience. The corresponding speaking area is presented in parentheses in the table. Teachers should refer to the Speaking section of *A Guide to Curriculum Planning in English Language Arts* for complementary information.

**Table 2****Writing Skills**

<i>Major Writing-Skills Areas</i>		<i>Primary Level</i>
		<i>Questions in the Revising Process</i>
<b>Content</b> ( <i>Invention</i> )	Clarity of focus, adherence to topic Sensitivity to audience Adequacy of development, richness, completeness of support (logos, pathos, ethos) Insight into subject matter, quality of thought, originality	On topic? Completion of thought? Details of support? Originality? Aware of audience?
<b>Organization</b> ( <i>Organization</i> )	Logical, sequential order in development of entire piece Logical organization and development in individual paragraphs Support for generalizations Unity, coherence, emphasis Appropriate transitions	Appropriate title? First sentence appropriate beginning? Logical development? Correct sequence? Reasonable ending?
<b>Style and Word Choice</b> ( <i>Style</i> )	Consistency of voice, tense, person, point of view Correct usage: pronoun agreement and reference, subject-verb agreement, tense Variety in sentence structure, appropriate to topic, purpose, and audience Diction and tone appropriate to topic, purpose, and audience Avoidance of sexist language Precision, clarity, richness of vocabulary Conciseness, avoidance of wordiness	Clear expression of ideas? Interesting vocabulary? Avoids overuse of <i>and</i> , <i>then</i> , <i>so</i> ? Consistent tense?
		<i>Questions in the Editing Process</i>
<b>Mechanics</b> ( <i>Delivery</i> )	Appropriate punctuation, capitalization, and spelling Appropriate paragraphing Appropriate format/manuscript form Legibility	Correct punctuation at end of sentence? Correct capitalization? Correct spelling? Consistent tense agreement? Sentence completeness?
<b>Publishing</b>		Legible? Suitable margins? Overall neat appearance?

<i>Intermediate Level</i>	<i>Middle/Junior High Level</i>	<i>Senior High Level</i>
<i>Questions in the Revising Process</i>		
Stays on topic? Some awareness of audience? Adequate development? Good beginning? Reasonable conclusion? Ideas clear?	Clear purpose or point? Awareness of audience? Adherence to topic? Support details or specific examples of support? Understanding of topic? Originality and creativity?	Purpose clear? Awareness of audience? Appropriate form for purpose and audience? Adherence to topic? Adequate development? Effective development? Originality, creativity, honesty?
Logical development? Sequential development? Use of paragraphs?	Logical or sequential development? General statements supported by specifics? Clear relationship between parts? Use of transitional words, phrases, or sentences? Use of paragraphs?	Logical or sequential order (entire piece and paragraphs)? Relationship between paragraphs clear? Use of appropriate transitions? smoothness of transitions? Unity, coherence, emphasis?
Clear expression of ideas? Variety of words? interesting vocabulary? Complete sentences? Avoids unnecessary words? Necessary words left out?	Clear expression of ideas? Varied vocabulary? richness of vocabulary? Avoidance of clichés, slang? Consistent point of view? Avoidance of wordiness? Variety of sentence types? Correct usage: subject-verb agreement, pronoun reference, tense? Avoidance of sexist language?	Clarity of expression? Consistent point of view? Consistent voice? tense? person? Variety in sentence structure? Avoidance of awkward, choppy, incomplete sentences? Tone appropriate to purpose, audience, and form? Avoidance of slang, colloquialisms, and clichés? Conciseness? Precision in vocabulary? richness of vocabulary? Correct usage: pronoun reference and agreement; subject-verb agreement; tense, number, and gender? Avoidance of sexist language? Active voice?
<i>Questions in the Editing Process</i>		
Correct punctuation at end of sentence? Commas where needed? Capital letters where needed? Spelling corrected? Fragments or run-ons corrected?	Correct punctuation, capitalization, spelling? Absence of fragments and run-ons?	Correct punctuation, capitalization, spelling? Absence of fragments or run-on sentences?
Handwriting legible? Use of margins? Use of title? Overall neatness?	Correct manuscript form? Legible?	Correct manuscript form? Adherence to form specified by discipline (e.g., science)? Legible?

# *Approaches to Instruction*

## **The Writing Process**

Once CTB/McGraw-Hill or local scoring reports have been interpreted, instruction can be planned to meet the specific needs of groups and individuals in the classroom. An average (4.5) or lower holistic writing score, in conjunction with other corroborative classroom measures, may indicate a need for greater instructional emphasis on one or more of the specific writing processes outlined below:

Prewriting (planning)

Drafting

Revising

Editing (proofreading, polishing, rewriting)

Evaluating (assessing)

Publishing

However, such a list can lead to the mistaken conclusion that writing is a simple, linear task comprising clear, discrete steps. While an awareness of these successive steps can be helpful in the abstract, it is important to bear in mind that the process of writing is seldom linear in practice. The stages in the writing process tend to overlap and repeat as a composition takes shape. Revision can be occurring in the writer's head long before a single word has been jotted down. Both revising and editing tend to be ongoing processes for many writers, and evaluating may take place at any point in the writing process. In short, there are as many approaches to writing as there are writers.

Nevertheless, a sequenced list of writing processes such as the one above can provide students with a framework within which they can examine and refine their own discoveries

and writing strategies. Of course, no one rigid "writing system" can ever encompass all the techniques students will develop for themselves as they become proficient writers. Thus, the definitions that follow should be viewed as useful signposts on the road to mastery of a complex and fluid process, not as fixed steps along a narrow, hierarchical path.

## **Prewriting**

*Prewriting* provides time to build strategies for getting started and is crucial in establishing the foundation for the work to come. It can also be one of the most frustrating aspects of the writing process for students, but it should be emphasized that the lack of an effective plan is one of the most common reasons for unbalanced or poorly organized writing. Prewriting includes organizing and exploring ideas, choosing a topic, narrowing the focus, gathering information, determining the purpose or audience, and sketching out an initial outline. Prewriting may involve discussion, role-playing, free writing, brainstorming, clustering, building links between ideas and/or events (also known as "webbing" or "mapping"), asking questions to discover facts and relationships, outlining, and other similar techniques. Prewriting encourages the writer to determine the expectations of the intended audience and to understand the purpose for any particular writing task. Students should be exposed to as many of these types of activities as possible, as no single strategy will be perfectly suited to every individual.

## **Drafting**

*Drafting* requires further refinement of the

writing plan and the expansion of the ideas contained therein. This stage is where a first attempt is made to fluently express ideas about a chosen topic. Activities connected with drafting include the determination of the best way to organize facts and ideas based on the purpose and mode of writing. Narrative writing, for instance, requires an understanding of chronological sequence. Informative and persuasive writing require an understanding of logical connections and the relative importance of supporting details. The ordering of ideas or events must also be reflected in the sequence of paragraphs, the use of transitions, and in many other textual elements. The primary goal of the drafting process is clarity of communication tailored for a specific audience and purpose.

## Revising

*Revising* is crucial in the writing process, yet it is often the aspect most resisted by students. They often feel that their drafts already say what they want them to say, and they chafe at the prospect of “doing it all over again.” Too often, revision is perceived as being destructive rather than constructive. To counter this perception, students should be exposed to side by side samples of drafts and final versions written by professional writers or by other students. Such a comparison makes the value of revision graphically apparent, and emphasizes the point that revising is not beginning over again. It is in fact a reworking of the original draft to give it greater power, clarity, and focus. Revising involves more than moving blocks of text or correcting errors. Good revising requires a reflective rereading, an objective evaluation based on clear criteria, and purposeful rewriting

where necessary. Because revising is concerned primarily with ideas and their impact, activities designed to encourage thoughtful revision usually emphasize ways to improve content and organization. It is in the course of revising that purpose and audience are reconsidered, tone is examined, supporting details are added, and digressions are removed.

## Editing

When *editing*, a writer addresses the issues of correct usage, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. These factors have a direct bearing on the fluency and readability of the paper. Many activities can help students clarify and increase the sophistication of their writing. An exercise in combining sentences, for instance, can help students find correct and inventive ways to express their ideas. The proofreading, editing, and final rewriting provide the polish that makes a finished piece of writing truly shine.

## Evaluating

Although *evaluating* is obviously an ongoing part of composition, implicit in the steps described above, a more formalized evaluation is generally the final stage in the writing process. Assessment of the finished piece, whether consisting of self-evaluation, peer critiques, teacher appraisal, or formal standardized measurement, is a critical step that is too often omitted. Indeed, assessment should be an integral part of any writing program. Only by assessing a student’s progress can a teacher determine how to proceed with instruction. And only with feedback and constructive criticism can a developing writer learn to honestly evaluate and improve his or her own writing strategies and techniques.

## **Publishing**

*Publishing* is often the ultimate stage of the writing process. The final work may be published informally in the classroom, where final pieces are assembled into books or other formats for display, or it may be formally published in forums such as the school paper or a scholastic magazine. Whether it is done formally or informally, publication encourages students to give their best effort and take pride in their work. Knowing that a work is to be

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published gives students a vested interest in the overall process, and adds to their enthusiasm as they write. When publishing is included as a part of the writing process, students are motivated to do better work. Knowing that their writing has an audience in the classroom and beyond allows developing writers to see themselves as competent and professional communicators.

# *The Handscoring Process*

## **Holistic Scoring**

The term *holistic* is applied to several systems of general impression evaluation. The holistic approach developed at CTB is based on writing prompts that are tailored to corresponding ranges of grade levels. Different prompts are designed to elicit writing in different modes (Descriptive, Persuasive, etc.). Writing samples are evaluated with close reference to a general rubric as well as to a set of model compositions specific to a given prompt and level. These sample compositions are known as *anchor papers* or *exemplars*. This scoring method provides useful information to assess students' progress, to evaluate their general writing skill, and to evaluate strengths and weaknesses in local instructional programs.

Holistic scoring has important advantages as a method. It provides educators with a reliable and valid assessment of the total effect of a composition. Reliability is ensured by training evaluators to give scores that are consistent with each other and that remain consistent over time. This requires intensive training, careful monitoring, and continuing reference to the scoring guide and the exemplars. When these criteria are met, the holistic scores will accurately reflect the total effect of the compositions and rank them reliably.

The exemplars in this booklet are modified versions of actual student papers drawn from a nationwide sample augmented by papers from the WSAS writing assessments administered in 1996 and 1997. They have been printed and annotated in order to establish an “anchor” or “anchors” for each score point across all six writing prompts. The exemplars do not purport to represent perfect examples of each score

point; rather, they simply reflect some of the qualities that may appear in papers given the same score.

Because holistic scoring requires a controlled but still personal impression, all papers are read by two or three evaluators. The second and third readers do not know the previous score(s) the paper received. If the first two scores are the same, then the final score is also the same. If the first two scores are one point apart, they are averaged to produce a final score (e.g., a paper scored “3” by the first reader and “2” by the second reader would receive a final score of “2.5”). If the first two scores differ by more than one point, a third reader assigns an independent rating. The holistic score is then the average of either the two closest scores, the two highest scores, or the two scores that are the same.

## **Training for Holistic Scoring**

The general holistic guidelines and the exemplars are used during the training process. Evaluators practice scoring and discuss their evaluations at length to reach consensus. Their eventual goal is to internalize the guidelines and make quick and sound judgments. During a scoring session, these judgments are monitored to spot discrepancies between evaluators and any loss of reliability in a particular evaluator. This scrutiny, along with the observations of the trainer and table leaders, is used to determine if and when retraining may be necessary.

Holistic training requires clear direction in order to help evaluators reach consensus. The training process is discussed in greater detail in the *Writing Exemplar Training Packet*, where you will find a selection of practice papers to score.



## *Guidelines for Holistic Scoring*

These guidelines have been developed to help score all modes and levels of writing. To help evaluators rate the “total impression” of the paper, the guidelines are stated in general terms. Therefore, they must be adapted to evaluate skills appropriate at a particular grade level and used in conjunction with prompt-specific exemplar papers.

Keep in mind that a paper need not meet all the criteria at a given score point to merit that score. A “5” paper, for instance, may contain some characteristics of a “6” and some characteristics of a “4,” but on balance will most closely match the criteria for a “5.”

## **6 Exceptional**

Taken as a whole, the writing response is

- well organized, with clear sequence and appropriate transitions
- stylistically sophisticated, using varied sentence structure and challenging vocabulary
- fluent and easy to read, with vivid use of language
- engaged, with an appropriate sense of audience
- focused clearly on a topic
- thoroughly developed, with relevant and well-integrated support
- insightful and logical

## **5 Commendable**

Taken as a whole, the writing response is

- well organized, with clear sequence and appropriate transitions
- stylistically correct, using varied sentence structure and appropriate vocabulary
- fluent and easy to read, with precise use of language
- engaged, with an appropriate sense of audience
- focused clearly on a topic
- complete, with relevant and well-balanced support
- thoughtful and logical

## **4 Adequate**

Taken as a whole, the writing response is

- competently organized, with a sense of sequence and basic transitions
- stylistically adequate; may use simple sentences and basic vocabulary
- readable, with no errors that impede comprehension
- generally engaged, with some sense of audience
- primarily focused on a topic, containing only minor irrelevancies or digressions
- adequately supported, though it may be brief
- literal and logical

### **3 Approaching Competence**

Taken as a whole, the writing response is

- weakly organized, with minimal evidence of a plan and weak or missing transitions
- stylistically awkward, with sentence fragments or run-on sentences
- readable, but may have some spelling and mechanical errors that interfere with comprehension
- minimally engaged, with an unclear sense of audience
- weakly focused
- poorly developed, but with some relevant support
- literal, with lapses in logic and balance

### **2 Limited**

Taken as a whole, the writing response is

- disorganized or too brief to discern an organizational plan
- stylistically limited, with little control of language
- sometimes difficult to comprehend, with numerous errors in spelling and mechanics
- not engaged with the topic, and shows little or no sense of audience
- weakly focused
- insufficiently developed, with few relevant details
- rambling or illogical, with little sense of balance

### **1 Poor**

Taken as a whole, the writing response is

- not organized in any meaningful way
- stylistically deficient, with no control of language
- often difficult to comprehend, with frequent errors in spelling and mechanics
- not engaged with the topic, and shows no sense of audience
- not focused
- not developed in any meaningful way
- inordinately brief or rambling and illogical



# ***Exemplars and Commentary***

## ***Grade 4***



## Grade 4 • Informative Writing

## INTRODUCTION

Helen Keller (1880–1968) lost her sight and hearing as the result of a serious illness when she was a baby. For more than five years, Helen lived with her family in Alabama, barely able to communicate even her simplest wishes. When Helen was seven years old, a teacher named Anne Sullivan arrived from Boston to teach her a special sign language that allowed Helen to “talk” to other people for the first time. But even with a new teacher and new language skills, Helen still had many difficulties to overcome. Here, in her book *The Story of My Life*, Helen writes about what happened one day when she was seven and her teacher left her alone in a tree while she went to get a picnic lunch. Read the passage and then complete the writing assignment that follows.

Suddenly a change passed over the tree. All the sun’s warmth left the air. I knew the sky was black, because all the heat, which meant light to me, had died out of the atmosphere. A strange odour came up from the earth. I knew it, it was the odour that always precedes a thunderstorm, and a nameless fear clutched at my heart. I felt absolutely alone, cut off from my friends and the firm earth. The immense, the unknown, enfolded me. I remained still and expectant; a chilling terror crept over me. I longed for my teacher’s return; but above all things I wanted to get down from that tree. A shiver ran through the tree, and the wind sent forth a blast that would have knocked me off had I not clung to the branch with might and main. The tree swayed and strained. The small twigs snapped and fell about me in showers. A wild impulse to jump seized me, but terror held me fast. I crouched down in the fork of the tree. The branches lashed about me. Just as I was thinking the tree and I should fall together, my teacher seized my hand and helped me down. I clung to her, trembling with joy to feel the earth under my feet once more.

## Prompt for Grade 4 • Informative Writing

Imagine that you are like Helen Keller and cannot see or hear. Think about the things you normally do in a day. Explain how you would do them without being able to see or hear.

## Example 6—Score Point 6

*When I wake up I cautiously walk out of my bedroom. As I walk I gingerly feel around for markers I put on the floor, so I know where I'm going. As soon as I feel the first marker, I hunt for the other. When I come to the last marker, I know I've made it out of the room.*

*Next I take five steps and turn to the left. I stand in my mom's bedroom door, and call her.*

*I wait there until I feel her hold my hand, and guide me out of the doorway.*

*She guides me down the stairs, and into the kitchen. I can tell she is making pancakes by sniffing the air. She puts the fork in my hand so I can taste them too.*

*After I eat, my Mom leads me back up the stairs and back into my room. I feel her pulling off my shirt and putting a new one on. After I'm all dressed, I ask my Mom to take me outside.*

*So my Mom guides me back down the stairs and into the backyard. As I walk out of the house I feel the sun's rays beaming down on me.*

*Out in the sun I feel totally free. I start to run around, without even feeling to see where I'm going.*

*After hours of playing outside, I carefully guide myself into the house. I can feel that the sun has set because of the chill in the air.*

*As I walk inside, my Mom guides me into my bedroom and tucks me in. She says goodnight, don't let the bed bugs bite. I've made it through another day in the dark.*

### Commentary for Example 6—Score Point 6

This essay effectively describes a day in the life of someone who is deaf and blind. The organization is sequential and well balanced. The body of the essay is focused, and the supporting details are convincing and insightful (e.g., “Out in the sun I feel totally free”). Word use is precise and sophisticated (e.g., “gingerly,” “cautiously”). This essay is virtually free of errors in spelling and grammar.

*If I was Helen Keller, it would be hard to do a lot of things. If I wanted to get somewhere, I would have to feel something, find out where I am, and walk to my destination. If I had a dog, I could follow him. Another way would be to hold on to someone's hand.*

*When it is time to eat, I would have to find my spoon, be careful not to drop it, and put it in my mouth. I would probably have a napkin on my lap in case I drop food on myself.*

*If I wanted to play with a toy, I would have to have my toys in a certain order. That way it would be easier to find the one I want to play with. If my friends are around and come to play some games with me, then they could get the toy or toys that I wanted.*

*To read a book, I would have to have it in braille. I would have to know how to read braille in the first place. I think reading would be the most important resource to me, because that is how I would find out the most information about the world.*

### Commentary for Example 5a—Score Point 5

This essay contains ample supporting details and takes a problem-solving approach to the difficulties of being deaf and blind. It is organized in a logical “if - then” pattern (e.g., “If I wanted to play with a toy, I would have to have my toys in a certain order”). This focus on practical means of coping is balanced by reflection (e.g., “reading would be the most important resource to me”). Overall, the writing is fluent and demonstrates mastery of spelling and grammar.

### Not Seeing or Hearing

I am going to tell you how I would do some of the things I do if I couldn't see or hear.

This is how I would work at school, eat and do homework.

First, what I would do at school is I would have my teacher help me with what we learned. I would use brail to read, and do the best I could to learn with my disability.

Secondly, I would need to eat. For what ever meal I was eating, I would sniff it to make sure what it was. Then I would feel for the fork so I could eat. At lunch, I would feel for my sandwich. I would already know what it was because my mom told me.

Lastly, I would need to do my homework. I would have my parents help me. I would also want a special teacher to come to our house. I would get brail books so I could read out of our text books.

In conclusion, I would go to school, eat and do homework every day. While writing this it made me think of what a hard time Helen Keler must of had. I hope no one ever again has to live through that.

### Commentary for Example 5b—Score Point 5

This essay is organized “by the numbers,” describing how the writer would cope with school, with meals, and with homework if he or she were deaf and blind. Focus is maintained throughout, and supporting details are adequate and relevant. Reflection is evident in the last paragraph, where the writer empathizes with Helen Keller and hopes “no one ever again has to live through that.” This essay contains only minor errors in spelling and grammar.

If I were like Helen Keller, the things I would do normally every day without having to hear or see is play with a puzzle because you don't have to see or hear you just have to touch.

I would smell the flowers because you don't have to hear or see you have to be able to smell. I would lay under the sun and feel the rays on my body. I would doodle with a pencil and paper because you don't have to see or hear you just have to have an imagination. I would eat because you don't need to see or hear to eat. I would sew because if you are coordinated you wouldn't need to hear or see. I would drink because you don't need to hear or see to swallow.

Those are the things I would do.

### Commentary for Example 4a—Score Point 4

This essay describes how the writer would cope with deafness and blindness by outlining activities that do not require hearing or sight. Though supporting details are accurate, they are literal; there is little evidence of insight or empathy. The organization is adequate, and word choice is basic. Sentence structure is simple and repetitive (e.g., “I would sew because...,” “I would drink because...”).

I would do a day this way:

Getting up in the morning would be easy. Getting dressed would be hard. I would need help from my parents, but I could do it. Eating breakfast would be difficult. The only thing I would need are help and my hands. School would be very difficult. I would need help for everything. Lunch would be the same as breakfast. School will still be the same after lunch. Watching t.v., playing video games or using the computer would all be pointless. Dinner is the same as lunch. My bath would be moderate. And at last bedtime; easiest of them all.

### Commentary for Example 4b—Score Point 4

This essay briefly but adequately assesses the relative difficulties of various mundane activities for the deaf and blind person. It is adequately organized in a sequential manner. Supporting details are often reduced to a mere rating of difficulty (e.g., “Getting up in the morning would be easy”). However, the essay follows its own logic to a somewhat humorous conclusion (“...bedtime; easiest of them all”). Use of language is competent, and sentence structure is varied somewhat.

If I was like Hellen Keller it would be hard to do things in the morning I need to take a bath and change clouse and Brush my teeth. In at the afternoon I have to go to school and it well be Hard to Learn about stuff and read some storys. Whend I go home I need to grab somebody to take me home but how do I now if it well be my mom or another person? I well stay in the calass room and jeust stay till my mom picks me up. And latter it well be hard to sleep I well be turning around the bed and I well not sleep.

### Commentary for Example 3a—Score Point 3

This essay, though focused and organized sequentially, has only limited control of writing mechanics and style. Run-on sentences sometimes make it difficult to read. This essay is essentially a list of activities, with little in the way of an introduction and no conclusion. Supporting details are relevant but scant.

If I were Blind and Deaf it would be hard Because I wouldnt Be able to do things like ride a Bike, go to the zoo or fly a kite. Be- cause I wouldnt be able to see or hear. I also wouldnt get to watch TV or play Nintendo. If I were only Deaf it would Be a lot easier Because I could fly a kite and i could Ride a Bike. The only problem i would have is I wouldnt Be able to hear.

### Commentary for Example 3b—Score Point 3

This brief essay lists several activities that would be impossible if the writer were deaf and blind and then digresses somewhat to a consideration of how much easier it would be to be deaf, but not blind. Development is relevant but scant, and the organization of the essay is unbalanced.

*I would feel Like Helen. It would be diffrent like for not seeing and not hearing. i don't now what will i do if i didn't see or hear like Helen. I guess How Helen would be feeling for not seeing or Hearing probably she would be feeling terrible. i wish that was me instead of Helen.*

### Commentary for Example 2—Score Point 2

This essay is weakened by its focus on Helen Keller's feelings rather than on a description of how the writer might cope with similar handicaps. Supporting details are insufficient (e.g., "i don't now what will i do if i didn't see or hear..."), and there is no evidence of an organizational plan. Serious errors in grammar, spelling, and syntax combine to interfere with effective communication.

Suddenly what to look from a nader. teacher for miucke  
and she to is teacher for narmen and is teacher to get no  
manen no mucke and she when to a nader teacher and she  
toder manen and the teacher toger narmen no meuchee and  
she when to esli to a tree hous my feet ocre moce.

### Commentary for Example 1—Score Point 1

This essay contains numerous errors that obstruct meaning. All that can be readily discerned are a few words related to the story of Helen Keller (e.g., “teacher,” “tree hous”). Spelling errors make it difficult to decode the rest of the text.

## Grade 4 • Descriptive Writing

### INTRODUCTION

Here is a story called “Grandma’s Favorite Bell” by Marilyn Kratz. The story is about a girl who enjoys visiting her grandmother. Read the story and then complete the writing assignment that follows.

### Grandma’s Favorite Bell

Every Saturday morning Abbie went to Grandma’s house. It was Abbie’s favorite time in the week.

Grandma always made them each a piece of hot, buttery toast. She let Abbie sprinkle sugar and cinnamon on hers.

Then Abbie always helped dust Grandma’s bell collection.

One Saturday morning Abbie said, “Grandma, which is your favorite bell?”

Grandma’s eyes twinkled. “Why don’t you try to guess?” she said.

“Is it this old school bell you used when you were a teacher?” asked Abbie.

“No,” said Grandma. “But it does remind me of many happy times.”

“Is it this glass Christmas bell?”

“No,” said Grandma. “Try again.”

“Is it this string of little round bells that horses used to wear?”

Grandma smiled. “They have a cheerful sound, but not as cheerful as the sound of my favorite bell.”

Abbie looked at all the bells in Grandma’s tall glass cupboard. There were big bells and little bells, shiny bells and old bells, painted bells and plain bells.

“It is too hard to guess,” Abbie said.  
“Please tell me which bell is your favorite.”

Grandma gave Abbie a big, warm hug and said, “My favorite bell is my doorbell when I hear you ring it every Saturday morning.”

Abbie laughed, and she hugged Grandma back. “That’s my favorite bell, too,” she said.

### Prompt for Grade 4 • Descriptive Writing

Abbie and her grandmother have a bell that is very special to them both. Do you have something that is as special to you as their bell is to them? Describe your special object. Tell what it looks, sounds, smells, tastes, and feels like.

## Example 6—Score Point 6

*MY FAVORITE BLANKET*

*I have a blanket that comforts me and keeps me warm at night. This is my most special item. It has different looks and aromas than anything else I have. Usually, I bring it to my family room when I watch T.V.*

*My blanket has smooth lining on the edges, which cools me off in the summer when laid on the air conditioner. It is soft, and very warm. It keeps my feet warm on chilly days. It feels like a soft, cuddly teddy bear.*

*My blanket differs in smells. I always wash my blanket, and when it is clean, it smells like the refreshing smell of detergent. It sometimes smells like my breakfast! When I cry, I hold my blanket tight, and it smells of my tears. When I get dressed up for a party, and smell of perfume, I usually get home late. I go to bed, and in the morning the blanket smells like perfume.*

*The blanket is a pale yellow on the outside silk lining. On the inside the shade of yellow darkens. It is squared, and looks very old. When the lining rips, my mom always sews it back with different color thread. So, the seam is green, yellow, white, and red.*

*My blanket is very special to me. Somehow it “brightens my day,” and “dries my tears.” My blanket is different from all my other things. It’s my most “prized possession.” I take it wherever I go in my house. I couldn’t live without it.*

### Commentary for Example 6—Score Point 6

This well balanced essay uses vivid and precise language (e.g., “On the inside the shade of yellow darkens.”) to describe a keepsake blanket. Support is ample and the essay is logically organized. Word choice is sophisticated (e.g., “aroma,” “refreshing”), and sentence structure is varied and controlled. In addition to a physical description of the blanket, the essay also provides insight regarding its significance to the writer (e.g., “Somehow it ‘brightens my day’”). The writing is focused and engaged throughout.

*“My Favorite Object”*

*My favorite object is my bike. It's special to me because I can ride to places on it and my friends and I have fun riding together.*

*My bike looks like it's in good shape and I guess it sort of is. It's not a special bike like a huffy hammer or other bikes. It's just a regular mountain bike. I can't do any tricks on it because it's not made for use of tricks.*

*It sounds sort of squeaky when I ride it up a hill. But usually it isn't squeaky. Other times it doesn't make a sound at all.*

*If I should smell it some time, it'll probably smell like oil because of the chain. But unfortunately the chain broke so right now it doesn't smell like anything.*

*If I would ever dare to taste my bike, which I'll never do, it'll probably taste really hard and cold at the same time. It won't taste sweet or sour or any thing much at all.*

*Last but not least if I feel my bike it's very cold and if you feel the chain it'll feel oily and your hands would be all dirty after that. So you see bike is very special. I am glad that I have it and I'm proud of it too.*

**Commentary for Example 5a—Score Point 5**

This essay follows an organizational plan that is focused and complete. Its description of a mountain bike contains ample supporting details. These descriptive details, however, are occasionally undermined by language that is more tentative than vivid (e.g., “It sounds sort of squeaky...”). The essay not only describes the bike but also explains why it is special (“...because I can ride to places on it”). Sentence structure is controlled, with only minor lapses in syntax.

### My Ballerina Bunny

One of my favorite things is my ballerina bunny doll. It's just like any other doll to someone else, but she has a special meaning to me. You see, I got it from my parents at my second piano recital. Everyone received flowers after the show, but my parents got me the doll instead.

The doll is also very pretty. She has a soft, pale pink body, and a beautiful ballerina costume on. The costume has a satin leotard and a pink lacy too-too. The bunny has long floppy ears, that are as soft as can be. On top of her head, in between her ears, there is a small circle of lace that matches her costume.

The bunny's face has long whiskers, a little black nose in the shape of a berry, a little mouth, and two blue eyes. Whenever I look at her, I remember when I was a little girl playing the piano on stage.

### Commentary for Example 5b—Score Point 5

This essay uses vivid language to describe a special bunny doll. Word choice is precise and descriptive (e.g., “She has a soft, pale pink body, and a beautiful ballerina costume on”). The writing remains focused on the topic, and it is organized in a logical manner. While there is a sense of closure, the conclusion is somewhat abrupt. Overall, however, this essay is thorough and insightful (e.g., “It’s just like any other doll to someone else, but she has a special meaning to me”).

My dog is very special to me. She is blackish and witeish. She has a red bandanna. She sounds sweet, but sometime she gets mean. When we first got her she smelt like ceader chips. Now she smells like any other dog. I have never tasted her but I bet she tastes bad. She feels really soft. She feels like a big fluffy teddy bear when she is clean. When she is dirty she is not as soft. When somebody comes to our house she gets really excited and jumps on them. When she was a baby we gave her baths in our sink downstairs, now we give her baths outside. When my dad plays frisby with her she goes and brings it about half way and then she drops it and leaves it there. When I move the push lawn mower she barks at it and thinks its a cat or something. She is the best dog in the whole entire world.

### Commentary for Example 4a—Score Point 4

This essay competently describes a pet dog. Organization, though somewhat list-like, is logical and proceeds from a one-sentence introduction to a one-sentence conclusion (“She is the best dog in the whole entire world”). Sentence structure is controlled, but not particularly varied. Supporting details are adequate, and there is some sense of engagement.

### My Baby brothers piano

My favorite object is my baby brothers piano. It's sound is very nice, but it has a very high tone. It looks like a regular piano, but it's a little smaller. The piano is black and has different color keys.

I don't think it really has a smell, but it feels very smooth and it is kind of cool if you touch it.

I can play about 10 songs on it. I really like its tone. But its actually missing the last key, which is pink.

Every body in my family likes to play on it. To tell you the truth, my uncle in Canada usually plays it when he comes to my house.

We might even get a bigger piano some day, so I can play on it.

So that's my story of my favorite object that I like to play.

### Commentary for Example 4b—Score Point 4

This paper, though brief, adequately describes a toy piano. There is evidence of a basic organizational plan as well as a sense of closure, but details are not always well integrated (e.g., “I really like its tone. But its actually missing the last key, which is pink”). Minor errors in spelling and grammar do not impede the reader’s comprehension.

My special thing is my cat, he's very kind, and lovable but when you mess with his face he gets mad. He is yellow and so are his eyes. He is funny to hug. If you give him a treat or anything else he will come up to you and give you a lick. Then he will run back down stairs.

The End

### Commentary for Example 3a—Score Point 3

This essay is a somewhat scattershot description of a pet cat. Support is scant, and there is little sense of closure. Although the focus remains on the cat throughout, there are no clear transitions between one idea and the next. This essay shows no real sense of audience.

My special thing is my bike I love riding it. It is my special thing because I got it for my birthday last year. It is red. It feels hard it looks nice but it doesn't taste, smell or sound like much. It is fun too.

### Commentary for Example 3b—Score Point 3

This essay is a bare-bones list of details describing a bicycle. Although it does contain some relevant support, details are vague and imprecise (e.g., “It feels hard it looks nice...”). The essay remains focused on the bicycle, but there is little or no sense of audience or engagement.

*The pool is fun to swim in. I saw the warter spacht on the lifeguard. I feet  
seement and warter. I haed the wissel. Then I went home.*

### Commentary for Example 2—Score Point 2

This essay, which seems to describe a swimming pool, shows little evidence of an organizational plan. The subject of the essay is not entirely clear. Though the essay attempts to describe what was seen, felt, and heard, this information is not adequately conveyed to the reader. The writing is seriously compromised by errors in spelling. Overall, this essay shows little control of language.

My home is a spindid place to live. shinny windows a  
scary way to live.

### Commentary for Example 1—Score Point 1

This very brief essay shows virtually no control of language. Though the subject of the essay is clear (the writer's home), the two sentences which purport to describe the home seem to be contradictory. The development is so brief, and the support so confused, that this essay is barely comprehensible.



# ***Exemplars and Commentary***

## ***Grade 8***



## Grade 8 • Informative Writing

### INTRODUCTION

Sometimes we move through our lives achieving goals quickly and purposefully. Other times we relax and try to enjoy the journey more than the arrival. Here is a passage that asks you to consider two approaches to an arduous task. Read the passage and then complete the writing assignment that follows.

### Two Ways Up the Mountain

Not far from where you live is a very beautiful mountain. Its peak is high above sea level. There are two ways of climbing the mountain; both require that you be in good condition. One approach to the peak is from the west and takes three days. The route is very scenic. You go through forests and meadows, past lakes and streams. Then the trail winds easily but steadily over exposed granite up to the top. The other way up the peak is from the east. On this climb, the trail is steep, with dozens of switchbacks or zigzags. You must negotiate rough rock screes and outcroppings and then cross snowfields before you reach the peak. This eastern route is less scenic, but you can make the climb in a day and a half.

## Prompt for Grade 8 • Informative Writing

Choose the way that you would most like to climb the mountain.  
Explain why you made the choice you did, what appeals most to you about the route you chose, and what you think your choice says about you as a person.

## Example 6—Score Point 6

*There are hundreds of mountains in the world. Some, like Mount Everest, are very well known. Climbing these mountains is a challenging experience. A mountain is a formidable opponent. There are many daunting obstacles to struggle against. It takes strength, confidence, and a positive attitude to reach the ultimate peak - the summit. To me, climbing to the top of a mountain is just like succeeding in life.*

*If I were to climb a mountain, I would probably chose the longer scenic path. I would choose this path because I think those who move swiftly up to the top are missing out on all the pleasures of the journey. They are so preoccupied with speed that they forget to enjoy what they are doing. Life is full of joys that should be savored.*

*One of the things that appeals to me about this route is the scenery. I want to enjoy my journey as much as possible. Even though it may take longer, there is a lot more to learn taking the scenic course. Even though it takes three times as long to get there, reaching the summit will be a lot more enjoyable.*

*This path says a lot about me as a person. I like to persevere until I reach my goal. I don't mind taking my time as long as I am finding out more about the world around me.*

*On our journey of life, we should choose the path that suits us best. No matter which path we pick, if we work hard and stick with it, we can all reach the top of the mountain!*

### Commentary for Example 6—Score Point 6

This essay thoroughly explains the writer’s decision to take the scenic route up the mountain. The introductory paragraph portrays the climb as a metaphor for life (e.g., “To me, climbing to the top of a mountain is just like succeeding in life”). This metaphor is interwoven throughout the essay in a seamless fashion. Sentence structure is varied and complex, and word choice is sophisticated (e.g., “preoccupied,” “persevere”). This essay shows insight by relating the chosen route to the personality of the writer (e.g., “I don’t mind taking my time as long as I am finding out more about the world around me”). Overall, it is a focused, well balanced explanation with a strong sense of engagement.

*I guess you could say I'm one of those people who likes to stop and smell the flowers. When I'm given a task, I work hard and strive to do my best. I try to get the best out of life. However, I'm not one of those people who look for hard work and challenges. I'd much rather relax and enjoy life as it comes.*

*Say, for example, I was given a choice between two means of climbing a mountain. The western route involves a three day long trip that's very easy-going and scenic. The eastern route is only a day and a half long, but very difficult with little or no scenery. Of course, given my laid back nature, I'm going to choose the western route. It will allow me to enjoy a leisure pace and to relax and enjoy the splendor of nature.*

*I don't like to do things just to get them done and over with. I think it's a great waste to rush around without noticing your surroundings. I'd much rather take my time and enjoy what I'm doing. You get so much more meaning out of life that way. Life is a precious gift, so don't take it for granted. Enjoy it, and sometimes take a little time out of your hectic life to just stop and smell the flowers.*

### Commentary for Example 5a—Score Point 5

This essay begins with an honest self-assessment that serves to explain the writer's choice of the less strenuous path up the mountain ("I'm not one of those people who look for hard work and challenges"). The writing is fluent and engaged, using sophisticated vocabulary (e.g., "splendor," "hectic"). The organization is logical and balanced, but the writing focuses mainly on the personality of the writer rather than on details describing the relative merits of the two routes. Overall, this essay makes a convincing case for the route chosen by the writer.

I would definitely take the hard way up the mountain. I am certainly not suicidal, but I do not fear death. Death must come to everyone, and we can't constantly worry about our own well-being if we want to truly live. I see a challenge as an opportunity for self-growth. Obstacles were not made to stop us, but to test us. If we do not take chances, our lives will become stagnant and not worth living. I see the mountain as a path to greatness and satisfaction. Whenever such a path comes up, we should not take the shortcut. Difficulty is something to welcome. I'm not saying you should go swim the Pacific. You would be very famous - if you survived. A good challenge would be a marathon. Or a geography bee. Or even a chess championship. Anything that could make you a better person is a thing worth doing.

I admit I would take the long way down to have some fun and see some scenery. But the hard way down and the easy way up? Not for me! Nobody ever got famous for descending Mount Everest!

### Commentary for Example 5b—Score Point 5

This essay presents a convincing argument for taking the difficult route up the mountain (“I see a challenge as an opportunity for self-growth”). It has a distinct voice and a strong sense of engagement. Examples of other challenges one might face (marathons, chess tournaments, etc.), although relevant, detract somewhat from the force of the main argument. Overall, however, the writing is fluent and controlled, with varied sentence structure and few errors in spelling or grammar.

*I would choose the western trail because I like to take my time and enjoy all of the beautiful scenes. If I actually did climb that mountain it would probably be a once in a lifetime thing. I wouldn't want to speed through it because its not fun that way. It's hard to enjoy something if you're trying to rush through it. Maybe after I climb the mountain on the western trail I would come back some day and try the eastern trail. It would be a challenge and fun to try.*

*I think that my decision to take the more scenic trail shows that I do have some patience even though some times it doesn't seem that way. It also shows that I like to enjoy things and not rush. I think that my decision shows a lot about who I am.*

### Commentary for Example 4a—Score Point 4

This essay presents a competent case for choosing the scenic route, and explains what that choice signifies (e.g., "...that I like to enjoy things and not rush"). Support for the chosen route is adequate, and there is some sense of engagement. Organization is generally good, though the essay's argument wavers a bit (e.g., "Maybe...I would come back some day and try the eastern trail"). The concluding paragraph spells out, in a literal way, how the choice of route relates to the writer's character. Overall, control of language is good, and there are few mechanical errors.

*I would chose to go on the side that takes three days. There are two main reasons for my choice. It is more peaceful and you get to go through meadows, forests. The choice I made says about me that I am a person that likes to enjoy wildlife and loves to look at lovely senery.*

*It is more peaceful. There are no rough rocks to climb on or around. You get to enjoy the senery. You see the beautiful mountains. You get to have fun, smell the beautiful flowers, and other plants. I would love to see all the beautiful things on earth.*

*You get to go through meadows and forests. You see wildlife. You hear birds chirping and squirls chomping on acorns. The bald eagle flying above the meadow. I want to see all the animals.*

*The west side, you can see more things. The land is more peaceful. You see all kinds of wild life. I love to see all the things I wrote about.*

### Commentary for Example 4b—Score Point 4

This brief essay focuses almost entirely on the scenic details of the western route. It is well organized, beginning with a brief statement of how the choice relates to the writer's character (e.g., "...a person that likes to enjoy wildlife and loves to look at lovely senery") and ending with a perfunctory summary statement. Support consists mainly of a description of the sights along the western path. There are some problems with sentence structure and grammar, but overall the control of language is adequate.

I'd rather take the Hard way than the easy way because,  
One: I like to hike and climb two: I Like a challenge; three: It  
looks like fun. I'd rather climb dangerous cliffs and breaking  
rocks than take a dull scenic route and Hike. It would be fun to  
take the scenic route back but the scenic rout up is for Girls. It  
would be fun to use all the equipment for climbing like the rope  
and the Harness.

I like dangerous things like climbing mountains, parachuting,  
and Boarding. I think I'm a dangerous person. Danger is my  
middel Name.

### Commentary for Example 3a—Score Point 3

This essay is a weakly organized list of reasons for choosing the more difficult route (e.g., “One: I like to hike and climb”). Transitions are either rough or nonexistent, and use of language is awkward (e.g., “I'd rather climb dangerous cliffs and breaking rocks than take a dull scenic route and Hike”). There is an attempt to show what the choice signifies about the writer (“I think I'm a dangerous person”), but overall this essay inadequately fulfills the requirements of the prompt.

I'd take a trail so it would be prettier and safer plus I wouldn't get lost. I chose it cause thats how I would like to travel, plus I wouldn't have to worry about dyin or getting hurt. It says that I'm afraid of hights cause I wouldn't like to fall from a mountain plus it says that I like to do things the easy way not the hard way. It also says that I'm a person that is afraid to get lost.

### Commentary for Example 3b—Score Point 3

This essay explains why the writer would take “a trail” rather than endure the steep climb to the top. In simple language, it lists several examples of what this choice signifies (e.g., “It says that I’m afraid of hights...”). Sentence structure is simple and repetitive, and word choice is basic. Errors in grammar and syntax do not interfere with comprehension. Support is scant, and though there is evidence of a rudimentary organizational plan, there is no sense of closure.

i'd take the seanic Trail to get up the mountain  
because its nicer and eesier and i make a walking stick to  
use to help me climb the steep parts of the Trail.

### Commentary for Example 2—Score Point 2

This essay, though it does address the topic, is insufficiently supported. It offers only one relevant reason for choosing the scenic route, followed by one tangential statement about making a walking stick. There is no evidence of a sense of audience or of engagement with the topic. It is difficult to discern any organizational plan in a paper of this length.

*That was not good for them if they have  
two move off them that was good them if  
They whet morry off them to have a trale  
off they alone. And I think that was ok  
because they like these two more. And I think  
that was good atina of them because they  
was looking ot the rock they whent home they  
was afert off the mountain rock. The rock  
can grebe awal of ammy bodies.*

### Commentary for Example 1—Score Point 1

This essay borders on being incomprehensible. Although in places it seems to address the prompt, there is no discernible argument for choosing one of the two routes to the top of the mountain. Errors in spelling and mechanics obscure the meaning of this essay.

## Grade 8 • Persuasive Writing

### INTRODUCTION

Here is a passage about some of the places and things that have been considered “Wonders of the World.” Read the passage and then complete the writing assignment that follows.

Over the years, many people have made lists of the most impressive and beautiful sights they have seen. Over two thousand years ago a man named Antipater of Sidon made a list of the “Seven Wonders of the World.” Among them he included the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Pyramids of Egypt, the statue of Zeus at Olympia in Greece, and the Pharos (lighthouse) of Alexandria in Egypt. All were impressive in size, beauty, and construction. All were inspirational and some, like the Pharos of Alexandria, had a very practical use.

Other people since Antipater have made different lists of “Wonders of the World.” Some lists have included the Great Wall of China, the Grand Canyon of the Colorado River, the Taj Mahal of India, and other places of special beauty and wonder. Other lists have included important inventions such as the electric light bulb and the printing press.

## Prompt for Grade 8 • Persuasive Writing

If you could add an eighth “Wonder of the World,” what would it be? Citing the qualities and characteristics that you think are important, write an argument that supports your choice for what the “Eighth Wonder of the World” should be.

## Example 6—Score Point 6

*The eighth wonder of the world should be the statues of Easter Island. These carvings of pure stone have attracted tourists for over a century.*

*The stone carvings of Easter Island should be the eighth wonder of the world because they are so beautifully carved, yet so massive. Some of the carvings reach 50+ feet into the air. They have resisted the elements for over 500 years, and continue to impress visitors with their primitive beauty.*

*These statues are worshipped by the natives as gods of strength and power. The natives believe that they still come alive at night, but by dawn they are again frozen in rock. As one native put it, "These statues contain awesome power, and thus my people fear them even when they are frozen in stony repose." Just looking at the pictures, I can understand what he means.*

*Easter Island is an island that consists of one big plain, so the statues are by far the most visible and impressive sights there. It is a wonder that the ancestors of the present day natives could have carved such statues, and in such great number. Even with our modern technology it would be difficult to make such awe-inspiring statues today.*

*As I have indicated above, the statues of Easter Island should definitely be placed in the spot of the eighth wonder of the world. They contain beauty, power and mystery beneath their stone faces.*

### Commentary for Example 6—Score Point 6

This essay presents a convincing and engaging argument for selecting the statues of Easter Island as the eighth wonder of the world. Ample evidence is provided in support of this choice, and it is conveyed in a vivid, persuasive manner (e.g., “they are so beautifully carved, yet so massive”). The argument is well balanced and follows an effective organizational plan. Supporting details and opinions are well integrated (e.g., “Even with our modern technology it would be difficult to make such awe-inspiring statues today”). Sentence structure is varied and complex, and the vocabulary is sophisticated. Overall, this is an excellent response.

*The Incan cities have stood for hundreds of years. The walls there have not yet crumbled down. If I could choose the eighth wonder of the world, it would be the Incan cities.*

*These cities have stood for hundreds of years almost untouched by nature. The large rocks have remained unshakable to earthquakes, and there is no erosion from harsh desert sand.*

*These large cities have beautiful designs and sculptures that were made by hand. The cities were made entirely by hand because there was no machinery.*

*The cities are filled with beautiful plants and vines, even in the desert. The irrigation makes plant growing and farming easy.*

*These cities were entirely man made, with no machinery. The large straight edged stones show much skill, and the plants and water in the middle of the desert show good planning.*

*The reasons are shown above: shouldn't these large buildings built entirely by hand, with hand carved designs become the eighth "Great Wonder of the World"? There is no reason why not. These cities are just as amazing as the Pyramids and the Great Wall. I know what the eighth wonder of the world should be, and from the information I gave you, I'm sure you will agree.*

### Commentary for Example 5a—Score Point 5

This essay arguing for Incan cities as the eighth wonder of the world is amply supported with relevant details. Although it is weakened slightly by the repetition of certain facts (e.g., that the cities were entirely handmade), the essay is well organized and logical in its argument. There is a clear sense of audience and engagement, especially in the concluding paragraph (e.g., "These cities are just as amazing as the Pyramids and the Great Wall"). Use of language is fluent and controlled.

I believe the “Statue of Liberty” should be the eighth “wonder of the world” because it has made an amazing difference in the lives of people. When the French built it they wanted to reward us with its beauty and meaning. People respect, love, and honor the Statue. It’s our symbol of freedom and liberty, and a welcome sight to people immigrating to the United States.

Many people come to see the Statue of Liberty each year, for it’s a major tourist attraction. There are even steps up the statue so you can climb to the top. Books and movies have been made to show how it was built and what it symbolizes. It also might “guest star” in a commercial or movie plot from time to time. Its fame is widespread throughout the world. Now it is probably seen by more tourists than any other vacation sight.

In fifth grade, I even went on a field trip to see it. People were eagerly crowding around it like players before a big game. My friend said, “This is the best field trip ever!” I agreed. “It is so huge when you’re this close!”

So you see, I think the Statue of Liberty is qualified to be the eighth “Wonder of the World.” It’s not just a statue, it’s a symbol.

### Commentary for Example 5b—Score Point 5

This essay, although relatively brief, does a very good job of persuading the reader that the Statue of Liberty deserves to be the eighth wonder of the world. The reasons given are varied, ranging from the statue’s beauty to its symbolic significance. A sense of engagement is obvious throughout, and the writer includes a personal impression of the statue as supplemental support. Sentence structure is varied, and the writing is vivid (e.g., “People were eagerly crowding around it like players before a big game”). Overall, it is a very good response.

*I think the eight "Wonder of the World," should be Lake Ontario. It is a beautiful sight when you first wake up in the morning. In fact, it is beautiful all day and all night too. There are joyful sounds of frogs croaking in the morning and the crickets sounding off in the light breeze. There are the sound of jet skis, motor boats, and people having fun. The lake has a crystal glaze over it, and the islands are beautifully covered with trees. At Lake Ontario there are locks so boats can travel from lake to lake. I wish I was there right now. It's so peaceful and elegant.*

*Some day if you are home and feel bored, pack up and take a seven hour drive up to Lake Ontario. Then you can see what I mean.*

*I remember the very first time I saw Lake Ontario, I was about five. It was the most beautiful thing I ever saw. The tempature in the water is about 80°F most of the time.*

*Go see the eight "Wonder of the World", Lake Ontario.*

### Commentary for Example 4a—Score Point 4

This essay is a heartfelt argument for making Lake Ontario the eighth wonder of the world. While the writer's engagement is never in doubt (e.g., "I wish I was there right now"), the organization is merely adequate: a lack of transitions makes the writing choppy at times. There is sufficient support, though some details are devoid of context (e.g., "The tempature in the water is about 80° F most of the time"). Sentence structure is generally simple but correct. Word choice ranges from vivid (e.g., "The lake has a *crystal glaze* over it...") to awkward (e.g., "It's so peaceful and elegant").

*The “Eighth Wonder of the World,” should be Disney World. Disney World is a very exciting place to go. Disney World should be the eighth wonder because Disney World is very beautiful, very big, and everyone loves it! It also has great rides like Splash Mountain and Space Mountain. People go there because they love it, to get away from things, or for their kids.*

*One other thing is Disney World hotels. The hotels are big, they have huge swimming pools. A “Wonder of the World” should be based on size and beauty. That’s why I think that Disney World should be the “Eighth Wonder of the World”.*

### Commentary for Example 4b—Score Point 4

This essay briefly runs down the reasons for making Disney World the eighth wonder of the world. It focuses unwaveringly on Disney World’s assets, following a simple organizational plan to a perfunctory conclusion. There is some sense of engagement (e.g., “...everyone loves it!”), but the argument is mainly cut and dried. Control of language is adequate, and though there are minor lapses in syntax and grammar, they do not interfere with communication.

The eighth wonder of the world should be motorized veicals. They can take us were we are going. They can get us home for dinner. They can help us by taking someone else somewhere. They can transport goods to where they have to go. They can bring home food. They can help by getting us home on time instead of being late. They can help bring a hurt person to the hospital. That's why I think motor veicals should be the eighth wonder of the world.

### Commentary for Example 3a—Score Point 3

This essay is essentially an unelaborated list of the advantages of motorized vehicles. With the exception of the opening and the closing lines, sentence structure does not vary at all. There is consequently little or no sense of engagement, and the effectiveness of the argument is undermined.

I think that lake gorge is a wonder of the world because first, you can swim there. You can swim because there is water to swim in. Next you can ride boats on the lake. You can ride boats becas they allow you to go boating on the lake. Last but most of all you can go camping on the islands. You can go camping on the islands because they have islands to camp on. Thats why I think lake gorge is a wonder of the world.

### Commentary for Example 3b—Score Point 3

This essay is comprised of a series of tautologies in support of making Lake George the eighth wonder of the world (e.g., “You can swim because there is water to swim in”). Despite the circular nature of the supporting arguments, they are relevant. In addition, they are bracketed between an introduction and a conclusion. The writing shows only intermittent control of language, and it is rife with errors in mechanics.

If I was to add another one I would pick "The world,"  
Because we really don't know how the world got here or  
who made it. So I think the world is a wonder how it got  
here, and the rest of the planets like the sun, moon . . .

### Commentary for Example 2—Score Point 2

This essay, though it describes the world itself as an eighth wonder, provides only minimal support for that choice. Even that scant support is diluted by the concluding line, wherein the world is lumped with the sun, the moon, and the other planets. There is little evidence of an organizational plan: rather than coming to a conclusion, the essay merely fades away.

Many Years ago I found the eighth Wonder of the World and the name was Pacific and it was a bad thing but everybody love it like shoe repairers and teachers, kids just about every body did.

Then everybody started making differeant list and others lists have inventions such as copying machined and computers and so

### Commentary for Example 1—Score Point 1

This response, though it alludes to an eighth wonder of the world, is essentially absurd. There is no recognizable topic, and no sense of an organizational plan.



# ***Exemplars and Commentary***

## ***Grade 10***



## Grade 10 • Informative Writing

## INTRODUCTION

Here is a passage that illustrates how persistence can pay off in achieving a goal. Read the passage and then complete the writing assignment that follows.

Some tasks and goals are easy to achieve. Others, however, can demand long periods of commitment and energy. History is filled with examples of individuals who have spent years carrying a single project to completion.

For example, Michelangelo, the renowned sixteenth-century Italian artist, spent four years painting a vast panorama of scenes on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. A great deal of his time was spent high up on a scaffold, lying on his back painting under very difficult conditions.

Another example is the American inventor Thomas Edison. In the late 1870s, he endured many months of frustration and thousands of failed experiments in his search for an incandescent electric light bulb. Before he succeeded in his search, he said, “Why, I have not failed, I have just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.”

Persistence has also been shown by large groups of people. During the Middle Ages, many craftsmen from a city would work together to build a cathedral. The process was so long and so complicated that several generations of a family spent their entire lifetimes working on a cathedral they would never see completed. Even entire nations have exemplified persistence. Spain struggled seven hundred years—from the eighth century until 1492, when the last invaders were driven out—in its efforts to become united under one government.

## Prompt for Grade 10 • Informative Writing

Persistence paid off for the people described in the passage. Describe a time when persistence paid off in your own life. Explain how you benefited from sticking to something until it was accomplished.

## Example 6—Score Point 6

*In my academic career persistence has paid off many times. For example, right at the beginning of the school year, my Geography teacher, Mr. Lopez, assigned us our first major project. I did a research paper on fossils. I put a lot of thought and effort into my project and hoped that it would result in a good grade.*

*First I gathered my reaserch materials together. It turned out that I didn't have nearly enough information to write anything more than a very simple report. I had to find more facts and examples so that my report would be complete. I found a lot information at the Public Library, but I still needed more. I have a computer at home, so I tried the internet. I searched for many days, reading and printing out information. I found the final pieces of data on a computer program called Encarta. I even had a timeline and some great illustrations of the fossil record.*

*Now that I had the information for my report, I needed to assemble it. By this time, I was so sick of the subject that I could easily have procrastinated until the week before it was due. But I hung in there, and finished it two weeks early. After many hours of typing, cutting, coloring, and pasting, I was finally finished. It was a lot of hard work.*

*Happily, my perseverance was rewarded. My teacher was greatly impressed with my report. In the end, I was one of only three people in the class to get an "A." He liked my report so much that he put it on display as an example for the rest of the class.*

### Commentary for Example 6—Score Point 6

This essay clearly and concisely explains the value of persistence in the pursuit of academic excellence. The steps necessary to complete a research paper are developed in a balanced and logical fashion. The writing is marked by the precise use of language and by an appropriate and engaging voice (e.g., “I hung in there, and finished it two weeks early”). Sentence structure is varied and complex. The essay flows smoothly due to the effective use of transitional phrases (e.g., “Now that I had the information”). It contains virtually no grammatical or spelling errors. Overall, it is an excellent response.

*I'm not usually a very persistent person. If I can't get something I give up or ask for help. But I do remember a time when I was very persistent. For my eighth birthday I got a bicycle from my grandma. It was blue and white and had a basket attached to the front. I was so excited about it because my brother and my sister both had bikes and always went riding. I used to have to run along beside them while they rode, and I hated it!*

*I was anxious to learn to ride but my birthday is right before winter so I had to wait until spring. Let me tell you, that winter seemed to last forever. I did a lot of puzzles and once or twice we went sledding. Finally spring rolled around. My dad got my bike out of the garage and we went across the street to where there was a sidewalk. I thought riding a bike would be easy, because everyone I knew could do it already. Boy was I wrong!*

*First I got on and just tried to balance. Then, with dad holding on to the back of my seat, I started off. About two feet later I fell. Dad helped me up and I tried again. Over and over I'd go a little ways then fall. Finally it got too dark to see.*

*The next day after school I tried again. After a couple tries I was actually riding! I went about a block and then stopped. Then I noticed that Dad was still holding my seat. I couldn't ride around with Dad following me everywhere, so I needed to try again by myself. I started out with my dad holding on, but whenever he let go I would fall. This went on for about three weeks.*

*One night when Dad couldn't help, Mom said she would. We started out the same way with me falling when ever she let go. Then on our last try for the night we started out and I asked her if she had let go. She said no and I kept going. After about two blocks I stopped, and when I looked back, she was way behind me! She had tricked me and let go, but I had finally ridden the bike.*

### Commentary for Example 5a—Score Point 5

This essay explains how persistence resulted in the ability to ride a bicycle. The sense of frustration and determination is convincingly expressed (e.g., “Over and over I'd go a little ways then fall. Finally it got too dark to see”). The use of language is fluent and controlled, and sentence structure is varied and complex. Organization is generally balanced and logical, though too much space is devoted to setting the scene in the first two paragraphs. This essay contains only a few minor errors in grammar and spelling.

About 3 years ago, I was in figure skating. I was a moderate skater. I never wanted to try some thing new. I didn't think I could ever be good. One day at practice my coach started teaching me how to do a jump with two spins. At first my bottom was the only thing that ever landed. I practiced and practiced. I was getting better, but I thought I would never be able to do it perfectly. For about a month I practiced until I couldn't any longer.

The annual ice skating show was approaching and I decided to try for a solo act. My coach correographed my routine, and of course, it included the jump! I tryed to talk him out of it, but he knew I could do it.

The day of tryouts for the ice show I was extremely nervous. I kept on doing my routine in my mind. Then it was my turn. The music started and I began to skate. I proceeded through the routine and right before the jump I took a deep breath and closed my eyes. Next thing I know I heard applause. I had landed it perfectly. This put me in the ice show for sure.

Without my persistence and strong determination I would have never been able to preform in the ice show. Since then I have worked until I successfully accomplished the task.

### Commentary for Example 5b—Score Point 5

This essay does a fine job of explaining how practice makes perfect in the world of ice skating. It is written in a lively, engaging voice (e.g., "...my coach started teaching me how to do a jump with two spins. At first my bottom was the only thing that ever landed"). It is organized in a logical and balanced manner, though the introductory paragraph doesn't specifically mention the maneuver that is the focus of the essay. Sentence structure varies from simple to complex, and there are only a few minor errors in grammar and spelling.

One day when I got home from school I felt like going down to the lake and fishing. I road my bike down the lake and tied on my rubber frog. I casted a couple of times to the pool in front of me and came up empty. So I tried a different spot this time with a different bait. I picked an open spot in the weeds and casted to it, but nothing happened. I tried another spot and still nothing happened. Finally when I was about to leave I saw a trout under some lily pads and it was huge! I quick tied on my rubber frog knowing it was the best choice for the situation at hand. I casted slightly over the trout and gently pulled the frog closer and closer to the fish. After a moment I heard a loud "slurp" and I set the hook too hard ripping the lure out of his mouth. I quickly casted again and once again this happened and I ripped it out of its mouth. Four more times this continued until the seventh time when I waited two seconds, then I set the hook hard in his mouth. I fought him for a long time before finally landing him. He was 3 lb 14 oz. Persistence finally paid off.

### Commentary for Example 4a—Score Point 4

This essay explains why fishing requires persistence. It consists of a focused, sequential account of a fishing trip. Though organization is logical and clear, the essay concludes abruptly ("Persistence finally paid off"). It is adequately developed, and sentence construction is varied. Errors in syntax (e.g., "I quick tied on my rubber frog") and spelling do not adversely affect comprehension.

*I guess persistence pays off everyday for me. I try hard in school to get the best grades possible, and it pays when I get my report card. After school I work out and get in shape for football, so I have a productive season. That and keeping in shape is good for me and will pay off for the rest of my life. On the weekends I work hard, and that teaches me discipline, confidence, and that having money is always a good thing. These things are also going to help me in 10 years and beyond. They will lead me to a healthy, successful life as long as I can keep it up.*

### Commentary for Example 4b—Score Point 4

This essay, though brief, does a good job of explaining how persistence pays off in several different situations (school, sports, and work). It is well organized and focused (the focus here is on the advantages of persistence in general, rather than in any one instance). Sentence structure is not particularly varied, but the writing shows adequate control of language. Minor errors in spelling and grammar do not affect communication.

I had persistance once. It was when we just had our cat have a baby, and it was mean. Right away it became the meanest little son of a gun. We tried to tam it down but it would just keep on scratchin and biting at us. Until one day we were able to pet it with out having to catch it but it would still be a little mean. But then it was pretty much ok. Until we tried to tak her to the vet. She would run around, yowl, bite, and scrach, and just go crazy on us. Then I bought an box with airholes and catnip in it. So now she it totally tam.

### Commentary for Example 3a—Score Point 3

This essay explains how persistence can be used to tame an unruly pet. It remains focused on the topic, and there is some sense of organization. However, frequent errors in grammar and syntax make it choppy and difficult to read. Some basic words are misspelled, and the essay as a whole is characterized by an awkward use of language.

In my life persistence paid off when I was working in a sport “baseball”. In this sport I had to work hard to get a position that I wanted. I had to work hard every day in practice. Well every day I worked hard and I got that position. So often every game I had to try to keep that position and I did every practice we had to work harder and harder. I kept that position because I worked hard at it and keep working every day. The coaches liked that I worked hard at some thing I liked to do. And they wanted me to work harder yet. They wanted me to work hard and get better at that position. And I have.

### Commentary for Example 3b—Score Point 3

This essay reiterates to excess the importance of hard work in sports. It explains how the writer had to “work hard every day” to get a desired position on the baseball team. This point is driven home so many times, however, that it quickly loses its impact. Although this essay is adequately organized, it is focused to a fault and characterized by awkward use of language and repetitive sentence structure.

I wanted to get a bicycle really bad but I didn't have any money so I saved up a bunch of money and worked hard to get the money for my bike.

### Commentary for Example 2—Score Point 2

This essay is insufficiently developed, consisting of a one-sentence account of saving enough money for a bicycle. There is no evidence of engagement or sense of voice. Although the single sentence has an initial capital letter and a final period, it has no internal punctuation. It is impossible to discern any organizational plan in an essay of this length.

*If I had a serios goal to go for but if I did I make sure  
it happen if it was really important. Or if it was not I won't.*

### Commentary for Example 1—Score Point 1

This very brief essay is couched in conditional terms (e.g., “If I had a serios goal to go for...”) and never specifies a time when persistence paid off. Control of language is weak, and overall the response appears to be confused.

## Grade 10 • Persuasive Writing

## INTRODUCTION

Life is filled with challenges, and we often face difficult decisions. Here is a passage about Jacob, who is struggling to make an important decision. Read the passage and then complete the writing assignment that follows.

Jacob is sixteen years old and in the tenth grade. He is funny and outgoing, and as a result he is popular among his classmates and his teachers. He is also a pretty good athlete and sings in the school choir. However, Jacob is not very studious. He has trouble concentrating on his schoolwork and would rather just have a good time. He thinks school is a waste of his time, since he's not planning to go to college and believes he already knows enough to get a job. He's considering dropping out of school and finding a job so that he can make a lot of money and buy the car he wants. His parents say it is his decision. His teachers think he should stay in school and try to apply himself to learning more. Some of his friends tell him it would be great to have money and freedom, so why not go for it?

## Prompt for Grade 10 • Persuasive Writing

Imagine that Jacob decided to drop out and that two years have passed. Now Bill, Jacob's younger friend, is thinking about dropping out, too. Bill has come to Jacob for advice. What advice do you think Jacob would give to Bill? Explain what you think Jacob's position would be, based on what might have happened to Jacob in the last two years. Back up your argument with logical reasons and specific examples.

## Example 6—Score Point 6

*The decision to drop out of high school and join the “real world” is one that many high school students consider. For whatever reason, they think that the things they’re learning in school are pointless, and that they can get by in the world just fine with only two years of education. This is a decision that will affect the rest of their lives, but all too often it is a decision that is based on some preconceived idea they have of the future: a future in which they no longer have anyone telling them what to do or how to live their lives.*

*Jacob made the decision to drop out of high school after tenth grade. Money and a job, a siren’s call to most teenagers, were too hard to resist. But in today’s society, where even multiple degrees and years of higher education can’t guarantee a good job, Jacob will be very disappointed at the jobs he can actually get. The two years of high school he opted to miss will be a monkey on his back — they will haunt him every time he fills out a job application.*

*I would conjecture that Jacob probably gave Bill some strong advice to stay in school. Jacob must have realized early on that growing up so fast means losing a part of your childhood. Also, while a tenth grade education may once have been enough years ago, in today’s technological society jobs require many skills that only come with a high school education or beyond. Jacob has probably had trouble finding anything more than a minimum wage job with little or no hope for promotion. I’m sure that Jacob would have told Bill how hard his life has been.*

*I think that Jacob would have had no difficulty in convincing Bill that the lack of an education is one of the most common hindrances in a world that increasingly demands more and more specialized knowledge and technical skills. Jacob’s whole life would serve as a warning to Bill of what lays ahead if he decides to drop out of school.*

### Commentary for Example 6—Score Point 6

This essay convincingly explains the importance of staying in school by vividly depicting the probable consequences of Jacob's decision to drop out (e.g., "The two years of high school he opted to miss will be a monkey on his back"). It is very well developed, and word choice is sophisticated and precise (e.g., "siren's call," "hindrances"). The writing flows well, and organization is balanced and logical. This essay is insightful and persuasive in its arguments.

*I think Jacob will tell Bill to stay in school. Because when Jacob left school and had to find a job it was very hard. He had applied to places where he really wanted to work. But eventually he realized that he wasn't qualified for the jobs that interested him. He finally had to settle for a factory job that was very boring and didn't pay very well. But Jacob now realized that this was as good as it was going to get.*

*In the factory, besides the fact that he isn't being paid to well, there are other bad points. It is kind of a dangerous job. You can get your finger or arm stuck in a machine. It could either be cut off or severely mangled. Another thing about working in the factory is the work is so monotonous that his hands and arms really sore after work each day.*

*Jacob always thought that he would have a lot of money to buy a real nice car. But instead he only has a pile of junk that he calls a car.*

*His parents had told him that he had to move out of the house when he got his own job. So now he lives in a really crappy apartment with hardly any heat and no air conditioning. He can barely afford to pay his rent and he never has any extra cash.*

*This is why I think Jacob will tell Bill to stay in school. Jacob now knows that if he had at least finished high school he would have had a lot better life. Because you can't get a decent job without at least a high school education.*

### Commentary for Example 5a—Score Point 5

This essay provides a well developed battery of reasons that Jacob should tell Bill not to drop out (e.g., “He [Jacob] can barely afford to pay his rent and he never has any extra cash”). Organization is balanced and logical, but the use of transitions is only adequate. Sentence structure is varied and complex, and vocabulary is precise (e.g., “monotonous,” “eventually”). A sense of engagement is evident as the essay vividly describes the plight that has befallen Jacob.

The two years have passed by and Jacob is working at a minimum paying fast food joint. Jacob, now 18, got a visit from his friend Bill who is 16. Bill wants to drop out and get a job just like Jacob. Bill tells Jacob his reasons, then Jacob begins to tell Bill how his life has turned out.

"Bill two years ago when I was your age I wanted to do the same thing. Drop out of school, get a job and save up for a car. I never realized how hard it was to get out and get a job because I didn't know a whole lot. Bill, it's real hard to live in the working world. The managers and older employees just thought that I was some dumb kid who don't know what to do with his life - who just dropped out of school and thought if he gets a job and cash flowin' in that it would all be fine. The only thing I was dreamin' about was savin' my money for my car. But after I dropped out my parents told me to get a job and start paying them rent for my room. Right now I have a total of \$278.50 in the bank from the past two years."

"I know for me it was hard to get a job. Job after job, going to companies and being rejected because I had no high school diploma. Bill, only now I realize that education is everything to a person you may want to work for. And the jobs that you do get, the workers will have no respect for you. You see Bill my dream was to be a doctor and make big money, get a house, get the car I want and live the life I wanted to live. But because I had no education I could only work at this fast food joint."

And all my friends from back in high school, I see them with new cars on the street while I'm still on the sidewalk. I don't get together with them anymore. Bill just think about what I said. Because if I could go back two years I wouldn't be workin' here. But the choice is yours. I'm just makin' it easier for you to choose."

### Commentary for Example 5b—Score Point 5

This essay takes the form of a monologue in which Jacob admonishes Bill to stay in school, using his own misfortunes as an example of what to expect without a high school diploma. It effectively addresses the intended audience (Bill), using a natural, teenage voice (e.g., "The only thing I was dreamin' about was savin' my money for my car"). Use of language is generally controlled, though there are occasional fragments. Errors in grammar and spelling are infrequent and minor.

Alot of things have happened to Jacob in the last three years since he dropped out of high school. He has been working 40 hours a week and he's getting sick of his job, but he loves the money. He almost has enough money to buy the car that he wanted. Only problem is, he doesn't have friends anymore.

Since he quit school he doesn't see his friends much, and most of them have moved on and forgotten about him. He is sad that he doesn't have friends anymore and he hopes he can find some.

Bill, one of Jacob's old friends from high school, did come to Bill for advice once. He was thinking about dropping out. Jacob told Bill that there is some good things and some bad things about quitting school. The good things are that you go to school almost as long as you work, but at least when you work you get paid. The bad things are that you don't see your friends anymore, and you can't go out for any sports. They kept on talking and Jacob said that it would be better for Bill to go to school, because if he goes to school he will get a high school diploma and get a better job. He will be smarter, he will be able to go out for sports, and most importantly he will be able to be with his friends during school instead of working all day doing the same things over and over.

### Commentary for Example 4a—Score Point 4

This essay takes the form of a narrative in which Jacob eventually tells Bill he would be better off staying in school. This narrative meanders a bit, taking a slight detour to consider both sides of the issue: “Jacob told Bill that there is some good things and some bad things about quitting school.” An inordinate focus on Jacob’s lack of friends slightly unbalances the organization of the essay. Control of language is generally adequate, though there are occasional run-on sentences. Errors in spelling and grammar are infrequent.

*I think that Jacob will tell Bill that dropping out of school is a huge mistake. Jacob's going to also tell him that when he first dropped out it was fun, because you make your own desisions and you don't have a bunch of teachers telling you what to do. After about a week though, you get to the point when you don't want to go to work and you miss your friends. It's also very hard to find a good paying job when you're application says you have a 10th grade education. Usually, if you can even Get a job, it's one that you do not enjoy doing so it gets to be just like school, where you just don't even want to go. In this case, though, you have to if you want to eat and pay rent. And then there's your friends. You would think that you would be able to see them all the time, but you won't because your going to have to work. It will get pretty lonelly when you don't have anyone to talk to. You will start to lose the friends you had because they will not want to hang out with someone who's constantly working. At first they might like it because they will be like, that's so cool he lives all by himself and gets to do what ever he wants — but pretty soon they will realize that your job is boring and so are you. For all these reasons I think Jacob will for sure talk Bill out of dropping out.*

### Commentary for Example 4b—Score Point 4

This essay is essentially an elaborated list of the reasons Bill should stay in school based on Jacob's negative experiences. Organization is adequate and sequential, but transitions are weak. There is a sense of engagement and appropriate voice (e.g., "...they will be like, that's so cool he lives all by himself..."). Use of language is generally controlled, and there are few errors in spelling or mechanics.

I think Jacob would tell Bill to stay in high school and get his diploma.  
Even if Bill isn't going to college, a diploma would help him get a better job in life.

Jacob's position in life is probably hard. Wherever he's working will  
probably be where he stays at. He might be great at his job, but a diploma help's  
you keep rising in the work chain.

It's possible that Jacob has a good job and might even become a millionaire  
someday, but that's not very likely to happen. Chances are if that did happen, if he  
had a diploma he might be even richer.

### Commentary for Example 3a—Score Point 3

This essay briefly explains why Jacob would tell Bill to stay in school, stressing the importance of a diploma. In the last paragraph, however, the writer speculates that Jacob may have become a millionaire. This digression undermines the advice given earlier, and the essay ends on a note of ambivalence. Sentence construction is awkward. There are occasional lapses in spelling and agreement, but they do not substantially interfere with communication.

Jacob will say that It's not worth it to drop out. You can't get a very good job without a high school diploma. Jacob will probably have had a few jobs and he didn't like them. So, he quit them and then had a hard time finding a new job. He don't want any of this to happen to his freind Bill, so he'll say to stay in school and get his diploma.

### Commentary for Example 3b—Score Point 3

This brief essay is focused on the topic. It makes a case for staying in school, but suffers from a dearth of development. Use of language is awkward, and word choice is rudimentary.

Job should tell bill exatly what Jacobs teacher told him.  
That if he has engh go for a job. But if he cant make it then for get  
about it. And the teacher's want him to stay for a good reason.

### Commentary for Example 2—Score Point 2

This essay purports to tell Jacob what he should tell Bill, but it does not take a clear position. Spelling errors and fragmented sentences make comprehension difficult in spots. There is no discernible organization or sense of engagement.

*First what I see he is looking at something bad but he should go school and his peers is like peerpresur to him and dropping out of school is not a good thing only if You make if well I hope peers dont give him bad luck and also he is not bad.*

### Commentary for Example 1—Score Point 1

This response, while clearly related in some way to the prompt, verges on incoherence. There are many serious errors in mechanics and usage, which make comprehension difficult. There is no discernible organization or focus on a topic.



## **Appendix A**

### **Individual Profile Report**

#### ***Individual Profile Report***

On page 103 is a facsimile of page 2 of the Wisconsin Individual Profile Report. This report, in addition to providing norm-referenced scores for five other content areas, includes a description of the student's holistic score in Writing. This is a facsimile of a Grade 4 IPR, but the reports for Grade 8 and Grade 10 are virtually identical.

The mode of the writing prompt is indicated (Informative, Descriptive, etc.), and score point descriptors are provided in the form of a summarized version of the Guidelines for Holistic Scoring.

Under "Observations" there is a brief description of how to interpret the information about the student's writing performance.







## **Appendix B**

### **Sample Directions for Test Administration**

#### ***Writing Assessment***

##### ***Overview***

WSAS is using the CTB Writing Assessment System, which requires the student to write an essay in one of several modes selected from informative, persuasive, and narrative/imaginative writing.

**Writing Books.** Each writing book contains an inside front cover for student-identifying information, a short introduction, a reading passage, a prompt, blank space for student planning, and two lined pages for the student's composition. The student must limit the composition to these two lined pages.

##### ***Oral Directions for Testing***

**SAY:** Now we are going to take a writing test. Do not open your book until I tell you to do so.

*Be sure that each student has his or her own writing book and two pencils. Hold up a book to demonstrate as you read the next paragraph.*

**SAY:** First you are going to read a short introduction and a passage. Then you will be asked to write an essay that relates to the passage you just read. You may use page 4 to plan your writing. Nothing you write on the planning page will be scored.

Be sure you begin your writing on the first lined page. You do not have to use all the writing space provided. However, be sure that your work is correct and complete. You may *not* use additional paper.

You will have 45 minutes to complete your work. I will tell you when you have five minutes left and when it is time to stop.

Are there any questions? You may begin.

*Record the starting and stopping times for writing. Five minutes before the stopping time,*

**SAY:** Five minutes remain for writing.

*At the stopping time,*

**SAY:** Please stop writing. This is the end of the writing test.

*Collect all materials.*



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